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PUBLIC STATEMENT

Clarification of comments in the media regarding Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry

Recently, the Winnipeg Free Press reported on comments I made during a presentation to a legislative committee as well as in an interview about the public inquiry into the death of Phoenix Sinclair. Those statements were reported in a way that does not place them in the context in which I intended.

As I said in the interview, this office fully supports the public's right to know the facts leading to the cause of Phoenix Sinclair's death. As well, the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) is hopeful that the inquiry will closely examine the extent to which recommendations made in two external, independent reviews of this case have been implemented to improve child welfare services to children and families in Manitoba.

The OCA was involved in both of those reviews. One was a special review specifically on the case involving Phoenix and in the other, this office chaired a broader review of all deaths of children from January 2004 to May 2007, who were in receipt of child welfare services, within one year prior to their death. This involved the review of 99 child death cases. The *Honouring Their Spirits* review is in the public domain and can be found here: <http://www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca/resources/special-reports>

Combined, these two independent reviews resulted in more than 200 recommendations. As the Manitoba Government pointed out in its response to the reports entitled, "[Changes for Children: Strengthening the Commitment to Child Welfare](#)", "Together, the two external reviews represent one of the most comprehensive studies ever done on the child and family services system in Manitoba." (p.4)

The public inquiry taking place on the Phoenix Sinclair case represents a significant, additional investment, (\$4.7 million thus far) to further examine the factors involved in this child's death.

We have a child welfare system that is large and complex. At the heart of this inquiry is a child whose life was cut tragically short. Could the system have done more for Phoenix? Unquestionably – we've made 200 recommendations in support of that conclusion. It's the job of the OCA to examine the best interests of all children within the child welfare system. My comments were meant to underline that mandate. Will this inquiry bring to light information about child welfare system deficits of which we are not already aware? Most important, will we invest an equal amount of funds towards ensuring that all of those 200 recommendations can be implemented in order to strengthen a child welfare system that better serves all of Manitoba's most vulnerable children?